



Hermann Oppenheim . . . and other stories

The useless hand of Oppenheim

A demyelinating plaque in the dorsal columns of the cervical spinal cord compromises proprioception and can cause a profound loss of useful function in one, or sometimes both hands, despite preservation of motor pathways and other sensory modalities. This classic, if rare, presentation of multiple sclerosis was first described by Hermann Oppenheim in 1911. Apart from its diagnostic value, it illustrates the importance of sensory pathways and proprioceptive feedback in fine motor control (*Pract Neurol* doi:10.1136/practneurol-2016-001494).

Exercise and falls

It's no surprise to learn that falls in very elderly people (90 years and older) living in a Californian retirement community were commoner if they had a history of heart disease, stroke, arthritis, or visual difficulties, or if they were taking hypnotic, antipsychotic, or antidepressant drugs. More interesting is the finding that the risk of falling was related to levels of physical activity a quarter of a century earlier (*Age Ageing* doi:10.1093/ageing/afx039). People who, in their 60s and 70s, had been active every day were only about half as likely to fall when in their 90s, even after adjustment for comorbidities and medication.

Uterine fibroids

Among 5500 women taking part in a study of health during early pregnancy, just over 10% had at least one fibroid detected by transvaginal ultrasonography. Although a similar proportion of participants experienced a miscarriage, there was no association between the two conditions. After adjustment for maternal age, ethnicity, alcohol use, and prior termination of pregnancy, presence of a fibroid had no influence on the risk of miscarriage (*Am J Epidemiol* doi:10.1093/aje/kwx062). Current views about surgical removal of fibroids before a pregnancy is undertaken may need to be re-evaluated.

Reducing body mass index

More than a third of patients who had bariatric surgery achieved a body mass index (BMI) of less than 30 within a year, according to a registry study in the state of Michigan (*JAMA Surg* doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2017.2348). The best predictors of reaching this goal were a preoperative BMI of less than 40 and having a sleeve gastrectomy, gastric bypass, or duodenal switch. Adjustable gastric banding was less effective. Fewer than one in 10 of people with a preoperative BMI above 50 succeeded in reducing their BMI to below 30 after surgery.

Breast feeding and atopic disease

People whose mothers had taken part in a large trial of an intervention to promote breast feeding were contacted when they reached adolescence to investigate a possible long term influence on atopic disease (*JAMA Pediatr* doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.4064). Assessed at an average age of 16, duration of breast feeding had no effect on lung function—measured either by spirometry or by self reported symptoms of asthma. Although the risk of flexural eczema was reduced, the prevalence of this condition was less than 1% in both intervention and non-intervention groups.

Stress in healthcare workers

“Stress means a state in which a person feels tense, restless, nervous, or anxious, or is unable to sleep at night because his/her mind is troubled all the time. Do you feel this kind of stress these days?” This question, delivered by short message service to the mobile telephones of people working in primary care in Sweden, turned out to be a reliable way of predicting sick leave, depression, and exhaustion (*Occup Med* doi:10.1093/occmed/kqx111). The prevalence of work related stress is high among healthcare workers and a quick and simple way of detecting it ought to be useful both for research and practice.